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TITLE: Automated contract negotiator/generation system and method

Abstract Text (1):

A contract system automates negotiation and generation of contract documents by managing the work flow in a contract approval process. Multiple users, coupled by a computer network, access a contract database containing multiple contracts with multiple contract components therein. The system manages communications and security between a client system and the contract database. A client applet facilitates user input at the client system and assists in a standardization of legal phrasing and contract negotiation. The client applet enforces business rules to qualify a contract for expedited approval. Generalized templates are employed to enable rapid prototyping and creation of new contracts. A method governs the automated contract negotiation and generation process within a business organization with assistance from a graphical user interface.

Brief Summary Text (3):

The present invention pertains generally to electrical computers and more particularly to systems and methods for automating the negotiation and generation of a contract.

Brief Summary Text (5):

Sales contracts are important elements of modern business. Among other characteristics, a modern sales contract typically includes business terms (such as prices, quantities, delivery dates and discounts), legal phrasing, and approvals by the parties. A single large sales contract may be quite complex and require input from diverse groups within a business organization, including a legal department, a business department, and other appropriately authorized personnel. Other parties to the contract may also provide input requiring modification to contract language and terms. Furthermore, large businesses are often drafting, negotiating, and executing multiple contracts with various parties simultaneously. As such, managing the contract flow and approval process for such concurrent contracts presents considerable obstacles and risks to proper contract negotiation and generation. In addition, these difficulties are commonly amplified by time constraints introduced by typical business pressures.

Brief Summary Text (7):

Products have also been introduced to assist a user in drafting contracts. Such products typically provide boilerplate legal phrasing from which a user may select choices of fill-in-the-blank legal clauses. One such product, the Quicken Family Lawyer Deluxe by Intuit, Inc., asks a user a series of context-sensitive questions and combines provisions and terms determined to be appropriate for the answers provided.

Brief Summary Text (8):

These approaches lack significant characteristics desired by a large business seeking to automate the contract generation process. As discussed, a document-based, or e-mail-based, approach present document proliferation risks and approval

process delays. Furthermore, products like Quicken Family Lawyer Deluxe do not provide desired workflow management, such as access control, approval coordination, or collaboration features. Therefore, need exists for an automated contract negotiation and generation system providing groupware-like collaboration mechanisms, version control, and workflow management. Moreover, need exists for an automated contract negotiation and generation system capable of applying defined business constraints to expedite the approval process of contracts therein.

Brief Summary Text (10):

It is an object of the present invention to provide a system that automates contract negotiation, approval, and generation among multiple users coupled by a network.

Brief Summary Text (11):

It is another object of the present invention to provide a method for using a computer system and network to automate contract negotiation, approval, and generation.

Brief Summary Text (13):

To achieve the foregoing and other objects, in accordance with the purposes of the present invention, as embodied and broadly described herein, the system of this invention may comprise a sharable contract database of editable data defining a contract as a plurality of discrete contract components that has a class level assigned to each user in a hierarchy of users having access to the sharable contract database; a contract status indicator field in the sharable contract database that indicates a negotiation status of the contract and is capable of changing during an automated contract negotiation process; and at least one database field in the sharable contract database that indicates a dynamic user access mode based on the class level and the contract status indicator, the user access mode being capable of preventing a user in the hierarchy of users from changing the editable data in the sharable contract database.

Brief Summary Text (14):

The present invention may also comprise, in accordance with its object and purposes, a method having the steps of providing a web server computer that stores a contract negotiator applet; providing a client computer coupled to the web server computer; loading the contract negotiator applet to the client computer from the web server computer; executing the contract negotiator applet on the client computer; providing a contract database coupled to a broker; and accessing the contract database by the contract negotiator applet via the broker.

Brief Summary Text (16):

controlling access to the contract database and defines the next approval level required in the contract approval flow. When a contract is approved, a new version of the contract is generated, and the previous version is maintained within the system so that a user can view previous versions of the contract. The system also allows standardized contract clauses to be used throughout the system and also allows customized information to be entered into the contract database. The system supports expedited approval policies by applying business rules to control specific contract terms.

Drawing Description Text (5):

FIGS. 4A and 4B depict a flow chart illustrating an automated contract negotiation system in accordance with the present invention.

Drawing Description Text (6):

FIGS. 4C and 4D depict a flow chart illustrating an alternate embodiment of an automated contract negotiation system in accordance with the present invention.

Drawing Description Text (15):

FIG. 13 illustrates a Quick Close Terms and Conditions screen in accordance with the present invention.

Detailed Description Text (4):

FIG. 2 illustrates the logical architecture of a preferred embodiment of the present invention. Web server 200 provides access to a computer network, such as a LAN, a WAN, an Internet, an Intranet, and an Extranet, and has access to a JAVA.TM. Contact Negotiator Client Applet 208 applet loaded on a storage medium. In a preferred embodiment, the JAVA applet provides the Graphical User Interface (GUI) of an automated contract negotiator and generator system and conducts communications between Contract Negotiator client system 202 and web server 200. Contract Negotiator Client system 202 is coupled to web server 200 via a TCP/IP network 204 or any other suitable network. A user may access web server 200 using a standard web browser, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.01. Such a user may enter a specific URL (i.e., web site address) into the web browser at Contract Negotiator client system 202 to access a web site on web server 200. When a network connection is established between the client system 202 and the web server 200, the JAVA applet is accessed by web server 200 and loaded into Contract Negotiator client system 202, which then executes the JAVA applet. Because the JAVA applet does not reside on Contract Negotiator client system 202 until it is downloaded via web server 200, the applet is known as a "zero-footprint" application.

Detailed Description Text (6):

The web browser on Contract Negotiator client system 202 may execute both byte-code instructions and machine code. Contract and user data used by the contract negotiator application is stored on storage medium 210 and serviced by database server 206, which runs Informix software on a dual-processor Digital UNIX system in a preferred embodiment. The JAVA applet accesses the contract and user data through the web server 200, which runs Microsoft Windows NT 4.0 software on an HP NetServer Pro in a preferred embodiment. Web server 200 accesses the contract and user data via communication with database server 206 over TCP/IP network 214.

Detailed Description Text (8):

FIG. 3 illustrates the architecture of a system for executing a contract negotiator in accordance with the present invention. The system employs a reusable client-server component architecture, herein called "netRoaster." The netRoaster subsystem resides between proxy server 304 and brokers 308. The netRoaster client element operates on proxy server 304. The netRoaster server element operates on brokers 308. In addition, a "webRoaster" component is combined with the JAVA applet and executed by browser 300. Proxy server 304 operates as the webRoaster server, and browser 300 operates as the webRoaster client. In the preferred embodiment of the invention, a webRoaster component is combined with a contract negotiator JAVA applet embodying the GUI and communications functionality of the contract negotiator. Client system 300 executes a web browser, such as Microsoft Internet Explorer 4.01, which executes one or more client applets. Web server 302 distributes the most current client applet code to client system 300 upon request via a TCP/IP network connection 313.

Detailed Description Text (15):

A preferred method of automatically negotiating and generating a 30 contract, in accordance with the present invention, is depicted in FIGS. 4A and 4B. There are six classes of users currently defined for a preferred embodiment of the present invention, but a greater or lesser number of user classes is feasible without departing from the characteristics of the present invention. These classes represent, in part, approval levels needed for contracts. The number and definition of user classes depends on the business process supported by a contract negotiator system. The configuration of user levels described herein correspond to a particular embodiment of the present invention, but other configurations are also contemplated in accordance with the present invention.

Detailed Description Text (16):

In this configuration, the first user class (Class 1) comprises sales representatives, who generally initiate each sales contract. Class 2 comprises pre-sale analysts, who make initial business and credit evaluations and provide pre-sale information regarding the Class 1-proposed sale contract. Class 3 comprises of branch management, who may review and make comments regarding ongoing contracts, but who do not modify contracts through the contract negotiator system. Class 4 users comprise business development analysts, who must approve the business characteristics of the proposed contract before the contract is executed. Class 5 comprises legal personnel who, at certain stages in the negotiation and generation process, have full access to all aspects of the contract data, subject to contract status restrictions. Also, in a preferred embodiment of the present invention, an administrator class (Class 6) is defined to manage authorized users of the system, to input legal phrasing, and to adjust contract trees within the system.

Detailed Description Text (17):

A Class 6 administrator does not have authority to modify contracts within the negotiation and generation process, but may provide modifications to user's contract baselines, templates, and other system components that affect subsequently initiated contracts. Subclasses of users, called "point-class users" (e.g., class 2.1), may also be defined.

Detailed Description Text (20):

As depicted in FIGS. 4A and 4B, a Class 1 user initiates a new contract in block 400 and inputs proposed contract terms and comments in block 402. When the Class 1 user initiates a contract, the contract negotiator system automatically assigns team members according to the Class 1 user's permanent hierarchy. The permanent hierarchy comprises users from each class, except Class 6, who are immediately and permanently responsible for that particular contract, and represents part of a contract team.

Detailed Description Text (21):

When a user logs into a contract negotiator, they are presented with a list of those contracts to which they are assigned as a team member. The list also includes a contract status and serves to solicit reviews and/or approvals from higher-class users. In block 404, the Class 1 user submits a contract, containing relevant terms and comments, into the contract negotiation process. After submission, all classes of team members may access (with appropriate class and status access restrictions) the contract. For example, Class 2 users may access the contract to provide pre-sale and credit review and to make comments regarding the contract (step 405). A Class 2 user may also "true up" contract database 412 to make it consistent with changes made to a corresponding hard-copy contract derived from the database. Except for these actions, Class 2 users have no other write-type access authority to contract database 412. Primarily, the Class 2 user performs informational and administrative tasks, not necessarily a strict "approval" task that impacts the system's workflow management. Likewise, in block 428, Class 3 users may review and make comments regarding the concurrently negotiated contract by accessing contract database 412 through the contract negotiator system, but Class 3 users have no write-type access authority to contract database 412.

Detailed Description Text (22):

A submitted contract proceeds to a Class 4 user (a business development analyst) in block 406, who manages the business impact of the contract. In block 408, the Class 4 user submits the proposed contract to the Class 5 user in the legal department, who may, in block 410, add to or modify the contract, or return it to the other users in the hierarchy for modification and review. In a preferred embodiment of the present invention, the modifications to the contract are made in a central repository (i.e., contract database 412) accessed through a contract negotiator system.

Detailed Description Text (23):

The contract may flow among the class users until all members of the contract team are satisfied with the terms and language of a contract (referred to as "automated negotiation" herein). When all required levels of approval have been obtained in block 413, a user in block 414 may obtain an executable copy of the contract 416 (e.g., by printing out a hard copy) and send it to the customer for review and/or execution in block 418. If the customer makes or requires modifications to the contract terms in block 420, the changes may be entered into the automated contract negotiation system as described above. This process continues until a signed contract is obtained, or the contract generation is aborted (e.g., if the parties cannot reach agreement). If the contract is signed in block 422, a Class 2 user in block 424 assigns a "signed-external" status to the contract in contract database 412. If the contract is aborted, a Class 2 user in block 426 assigns a "void" status to the contract in contract database 412. Any modifications made to the contract document external to the contract database are amended in the database (or "trued up").

Detailed Description Text (24):

Alternately, another embodiment (illustrated in FIG. 4C and 4D) in accordance with the present invention requires that the legal department capture (in block 466) a summary 472 of the contract terms and legal phrasing determined in the negotiation process and manually incorporate this information into a hard copy or soft copy external document stored on an external storage medium 488. Subsequent modifications are made by the classified user in the contract document 476 rather than the contract database 470. Otherwise, the process is equivalent to the process of FIG. 4A.

Detailed Description Text (25):

Unlike alternate methods of computer-assisted contract generation, contract negotiator is a database-driven system, in which a contract comprises many components stored in different table entries in a database. Each contract is assigned a number (or ID) that is used as a key to the records in the various table entries containing components of the contract. As each contract is approved within a central repository or database, a snapshot of the approved contract becomes the next version. Users will have access to view all versions of the contract over the course of the negotiation.

Detailed Description Text (27):

Five types of tables are managed in a contract negotiator database:

Detailed Description Text (32):

The User table defines users who have access to the contract negotiator system and is depicted below:

Detailed Description Text (33):

The User.sub.-- Hierarchy table is used to define a user hierarchy in the contract negotiator system. One entry is required for each user-parent relationship within the hierarchy.

Detailed Description Text (46):

A Class 4 user may also change the status to either "Approved" or "Approved with Changes." The status "Approved" indicates that the Class 4 user approved the contract without changing terms therein. (Examples of such terms include contract terms made available for modification in the "Pricing" template.) Alternately, the status "Approved with Changes" indicates that the Class 4 user modified terms within the contract. After either type of approval, the contract is routed to the Class 1 user for review. The Class 1 user may then request that an executable contract be generated by changing the status to "Request Executable", which causes the contract to be routed back to the Class 4 user. In an exemplary embodiment of the present invention, the Class 4 user may change the status to "Legal In

Progress" to submit the contract to the legal department. By changing the status to "External", Class 5 user may "take the contract external" of the system, which involves printing a summary of contract terms. The external summary may be used by a Class 5 user to generate a hard-copy contract, which may be signed by the parties. When the external contract is signed, the status is changed to "Signed-External."

Detailed Description Text (47):

In another exemplary embodiment of the present invention, when the Class 1 user requests an executable, the Class 4 user may change the status to "Legal in Progress", which will route the document to a Class 5 user for possible modifications to the legal text. The Class 5 user does not, however, have write access authority to change contract pricing or duration terms. A Class 5 user may change the contract status to "Legal Returned" to require additional rework by the Class 1 or Class 4 user. Alternately, a Class 5 user may change the contract status to "Legal Complete", which is effectively an approval by the legal department. If, after a "Request Executable" status, no legal text modifications are required, the Class 4 user may change the status to "Executable." From this status, an executable copy may be printed by a Class 1 user for execution by the parties. Such printing results in an "Issued" status.

Detailed Description Text (56):

The Contract.sub.-- Type table defines the various types of contracts available within the contract negotiator system.

Detailed Description Text (72):

The Quick Close tables are QC.sub.-- Term.sub.-- Conditions, QC.sub.-- Credit, QC.sub.-- Paging, QC.sub.-- Cellular, QC.sub.-- Local.sub.-- Price, QC.sub.-- Hype.sub.-- Term, QC.sub.-- Vmt, QC.sub.-- Audio.sub.-- Conf, QC.sub.-- Access, QC.sub.-- Dedic.sub.-- Leased, and QC.sub.-- Op.sub.-- Provision.

Detailed Description Text (73):

The QC.sub.-- Term.sub.-- Conditions table stores information for Terms and Conditions Quick Close options.

Detailed Description Text (78):

The QC.sub.-- Hype.sub.-- Term table stores information for the Domestic Hyperstream Quick Close Option and Frame Relay Quick Close Option.

Detailed Description Text (92):

FIG. 6 depicts a contract negotiator user screen for an exemplary contract in accordance with the present invention. The particular screen illustrated is a Question and Answer generic template (Q&A). Left window 600 comprises text identifying the associated contract, as identified by the contract number 616 (i.e., "0001122-01"). Most user screens within a contract negotiator system support a button bar and/or a menu to provide a user with functionality within the system. The button bar 620 and menu 622 of a preferred embodiment in accordance with the present invention is context sensitive. Left window 600 also comprises a tree view of the contract (shown generally at 602). Contract tree 602 initially shows only the base levels of the contract tree; however, the tree view may be expanded to display the detailed components of the contract. When a detailed component is selected in the left window, the right side of the contract negotiator screen will present a work area 606 having a notebook for data entry.

Detailed Description Text (95):

FIG. 7 illustrates the Clarification tab 701 of a Q&A work area. All classes of users have access to view the contents of Clarification tab 701, but only Class 4 users are able to modify information contained therein. If the information entered exceeds the visible work area, scroll bar 702 is available to allow a user to scroll beyond the initially displayed area. Text entered by a Class 4 user in a

clarification edit box 704 is viewable by other users within the contract negotiator system and are printed out with a contract summary with an embodiment of the invention illustrated in FIGS. 4C and 4D.

Detailed Description Text (102):

The term "Quick Close" refers to a special type of contract that enables an expedited approval process by negotiating terms that meet certain defined business parameters. Some components of a contract that represent the services offered are designed to have Quick Close options. When these contract components are selected and completed within the defined business parameters, an expedited time frame for approval is guaranteed within the business organization. This guarantee is in accordance with the business organization's policies, and a system in accordance with the present invention enables automation of such policies. When a contract component associated with a Quick Close option is selected by a user, one of several possible Quick Close screens is displayed. By selecting from those services with Quick Close options and allocating no more than a maximum number of points available, based on the contract term and the minimum annual commitment of a customer, there is a commitment by the business organization to expedite processing the contract to approval.

Detailed Description Text (103):

The Quick Close point maximum (i.e., total available points) is controlled by the terms and conditions screen illustrated in FIG. 13. A user selects an annual minimum commitment (i.e., the minimum number of dollars that a customer commits to spend annually) from list box 1300. Each combination of commitment value and contract duration (i.e., contract term in box 1302) is allocated a certain number of points. In a preferred embodiment, the available points are determined from a 2-dimensional data grid provided by a business department within the organization, with commitment values and contract duration being the two dimensions. The resulting value represents the total points available for allocation among Quick Close components and is displayed generally at 1304. The total available points value 1304 is stored in the central repository (i.e., the contract database) and allocated as the user selects and manipulates various contract component options associated with the current contract.

Detailed Description Text (106):

As shown in FIG. 16, Class 1 users with a defined hierarchy are able to create new contracts. No other class users have this capability. When a new contract is requested, before a contract tree structure is displayed, a pop-up box (1600) is displayed to the user. Pop-up box 1600 prompts the Class 1 user to input the name of the customer in box 1602, the contract type in box 1604, and a subtype in box 1606. Contract types are defined by a Class 6 user and are constructed corresponding to the business requirements. Contract subtypes describe a hierarchical relationship among various contract types. The Class 1 user may indicate whether the new contract is an amendment to an old contract using radio buttons at 1608. An amendment has data storage dedicated to describing the history of the contract. For example, such information may identify the original contract or contracts from which the amendment derives. The Class 1 user may abort the initiation of a new contract by selecting "Cancel" button 1610. Otherwise, the Class 1 user may complete the initiation of a new contract by selecting "OK" button 1612. The Class 1 user may then begin entering terms and comments into the contract tree of the new contract. The new contract is not distributed to other team members corresponding to this new contract until the Class 1 user submits the contract for approval to a Class 4 user.

Detailed Description Text (107):

Class 6 users administer the contract negotiator system. Administration includes activities such as adding, editing, and removing new users from the system. Class 6 users also assign permanent hierarchies to Class 1 users and maintain clauses in contract baselines (i.e., default contract trees).

Detailed Description Text (108):

FIG. 17 shows a screen used by a Class 6 user to add and update users to a contract negotiator system. In list box 1700, the names of valid users within the system are displayed. If the list of names displayed in list box 1700 exceeds the visible work area, a vertical scroll bar is available to allow a user to scroll beyond the initially displayed area. Likewise, a horizontal scroll bar 1702 allows a user to scroll horizontally to view the entire length of a name entry. A Class 6 user may search for a name in list box 1700 using search box 1704 and search button 1706. To search for an existing user, a Class 6 user enters a partial or complete name of the desired user in the search box 1704. If the entered name is found after the Class 6 user presses the search button 1706, the name will be displayed within the boundaries of the displayed area in list box 1700. The Class 6 user can select the user name by double clicking on the name in the list box 1700. When selected, the details corresponding to the

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (13):

Class 3	Class 4	Class 5	Contract Statuses	Status Class 1	Class 2
Submitted	C C C C N	BD	In Progress	C C C W C	Return for Rework
with Changes	C C C C C	Approved	C C C C C	Canceled	C C C C C
C C C Legal	In Progress	C C C C W	Legal Returned	C C C C C	Legal Complete
Void R R R R R	External	C W' C W' C	Signed-External	R W' R W' R	Executable
C Issued	C C C C' C				C Comment Access

Comment Access, but the status can be changed by a Class 4 user to "BD In Progress", in which the Class 4 user has Write/Update Access capabilities. N No Access R Read Only Access W Write/Update Access W' Write/Update Access limited to the following functions: Class 2 and Class 4 users may update the status to SignedExternal after the contract is taken external and signed by the customer. Class 2 and Class 4 users may also update the pricing templates to "true up" the terms of the contract held in the system with the final signed external copy.

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (29):

TABLE	QC.sub.--	Contract.sub.--	Points
Column Name Key Type Size Description			
contract.sub.-- number	Y	CHAR 6	Contract number
Contract version	pts.sub.--	avail	INTEGER Available points for a contract
- used	INTEGER	Used points for a contract	annual.sub.-- commit
commit values for a contract year	INTEGER	<u>Term</u>	period of a commitment

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (31):

Code	annual.sub.--	commitment	VARCHAR 8	Annual commitment values	year	INTEGER	<u>Term</u>
period of a commitment	points	INTEGER	Points for a component				

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (32):

TABLE	QC.sub.--	Local.sub.--	Price.sub.--
Val Column Name Key Type Size Description			
discount	INTEGER	Discount value	<u>term</u> INTEGER <u>Term</u> period of commitment
stdyr	CHAR 1	standard discount or not	points INTEGER Points for a component

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (38):

TABLE	QC.sub.--	Term.sub.--	Conditions	Column Name	Key	Type	Size	Description
contract.sub.-- number	Y	CHAR 6	Contract Number	(000001- 000099)				contract.sub.--
version	Y	CHAR 2	Version Number	(00-99)				component.sub.-- id
divestiture	CHAR 1	Business divestiture flag	downturn	CHAR 1	Business downturn flag			

q.sub.-- a CHAR 1 Quality Assurance flag tech.sub.-- change CHAR 1 Technology change flag chronic.sub.-- service CHAR Chronic Service Level Agreement flag std.sub.-- util CHAR 1 Reduction in standard utilization flag early.sub.-- term.sub.-- penalty CHAR 1 Reduction in early term penalties flag ramp.sub.-- month3 CHAR 1 Ramp period of 3 months flag ramp.sub.-- month6 CHAR 1 Ramp period of 6 months flag ramp.sub.-- month12 CHAR 1 Ramp period of 12 months flag emp.sub.-- benefit CHAR 1 Employee benefit program flag comp.sub.-- pts INTEGER Quick Close points for each component

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (43):

contract.sub.-- number Y CHAR 6 Contract Number contract.sub.-- version Y CHAR 2 Version Number (00-99) component.sub.-- id INTEGER Component ID disc.sub.-- percent1 INTEGER Local price discount term1 INTEGER Term std.sub.-- dsyrl CHAR 1 Standard discount or not disc.sub.-- points1 INTEGER Discount points comp.sub.-- pts INTEGER Quick Close points for each component

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (44):

TABLE QC.sub.-- Hype.sub.-- Term Column Name  
 Key Type Size Description contract.sub.--  
 number Y CHAR 6 Contract Number contract.sub.-- version Y CHAR 2 Version Number (00-99) component.sub.-- id INTEGER Component ID additional.sub.-- HPP CHAR 1 Additional discount about standard HPP comp.sub.-- pts INTEGER Quick Close points for each component

Detailed Description Paragraph Table (48):

TABLE QC.sub.-- Dedic.sub.-- Leased Column  
 Name Key Type Size Description contract.sub.--  
 contract.sub.-- number Y CHAR 6 Contract Number contract.sub.-- version Y CHAR 2 Version Number (00-99) component.sub.-- id INTEGER Component ID NPP.sub.-- level INTEGER NPP levels NPP.sub.-- flag CHAR 1 NPP flag npp.sub.-- disc INTEGER Discount value term INTEGER Term period of commitment commitment VARCHAR 8 Commitment comp.sub.-- pts INTEGER Quick Close points for each component

CLAIMS:

14. A method for negotiating a contract comprising the steps of:

providing a user-operable contract negotiator applet on a client computer;

providing access to a contract database by a first user via said contract negotiator applet, said contract database storing a plurality of contract components;

displaying information relating to a selected one of said plurality of contract components;

storing data received from said contract negotiator applet to said contract database;

submitting to a second user a contracts team list to which said second user is assigned as a team member; and

providing access to said contract database to said second user via said contract negotiator applet, responsive to said submitting step.

16. The method of claim 14 wherein said step of providing access to said contract database by a second user via said contract negotiator applet comprises the step of

presenting said second user with a list of contracts for which said second user is a team member.

17. The method of claim 14 further comprising the steps of:

receiving an approval status from said second user;

distributing said contract components to a third user;

providing access to a contract database by said third user via said contract negotiator applet, responsive to said distributing step; and

generating a summary of said contract components to said third user.

20. A system for automating a negotiation of a contract comprising:

a user-operable contract negotiator applet on a client computer;

means for providing access to a contract database by a first user via said contract negotiator applet, said contract database storing a plurality of contract components;

means for displaying information relating to at least one of said plurality of contract components;

means for storing data responsive to said displayed information into said contract database;

a status field in said contract database that causes said contract components to be submitted to a second user in said contract database if said status field is set to a submitted value; and

means for providing access to a contract database by said second user via said contract negotiator applet, responsive to said status field.

23. A method for accessing a contract database via a contract negotiator applet comprising the steps of:

providing a web server computer that stores said contract negotiator applet;

providing a client computer coupled to said web server computer;

loading said contract negotiator applet to said client computer from said web server computer;

executing said contract negotiator applet on said client computer;

providing a contract database coupled to a broker; and

accessing said contract database by said contract negotiator applet via said broker.

24. The method of claim 23 further comprising the steps of:

providing a proxy server residing on said web server and coupled to said client computer;

initiating a central registry coupled to said proxy server;

initiating a broker coupled to said proxy server and said central registry,

responsive to said step of initiating said central registry;

registering said broker in said central registry;

receiving a request to said proxy server from said contract negotiator applet for access to said broker;

obtaining from said central registry a broker reference corresponding with said broker; and

binding said contract negotiator applet to said broker.

25. The method of claim 23 further comprising the step of updating contract components in said contract database with user-supplied input received by said contract negotiator applet.

27. A method for generating a contract having terms that conform to a set of predetermined contract parameters, comprising the steps of:

assigning a number of contract points to define said set of predetermined contract parameters;

assigning a number of contract points to define said set of predetermined contract parameters;

assigning said number of contract points to a total available points value;

assigning a predetermined option point value to a contract option;

receiving a selection of said contract option for inclusion in said contract; and

deducting said predetermined option point value from said total available points value to automate the generation of the contract.

34. A system for automatically generating a contract among multiple users coupled to a network, said contract having a duration and terms that conform to a set of predetermined contract parameters, comprising:

a database having data defining said contract;

a first field in said database that stores a total available points value defining said set of predetermined contract parameters, said total available points value being a function of projected revenue over said duration of said contract;

a second field in said database that stores a predetermined option point value to a contract option;

a client applet that presents a user interface to allow a user to select said contract option for inclusion in said contract;

a third field in said database that stores a difference between said predetermined option point value and said total available points, responsive to said selected contract option.

35. A system for automatically generating a contract among multiple users coupled to a network, said contract having a duration and terms that conform to a set of predetermined contract parameters, comprising:

first means for storing a total available points value defining said set of predetermined contract parameters, said total available points value being a

function of projected revenue over said duration of said contract;

second means for storing a predetermined option point value to a contract option;

means for selecting said contract option for inclusion in said contract;

means for deducting said predetermined option point value from said total available points, responsive to said selected contract option.

37. A method of generating a contract comprising the steps of:

defining a hierarchy of users having a first class of users and a second class of users;

assigning said hierarchy of users to a contract initiator;

inputting a proposed contract into a contract negotiation system from said contract initiator;

assigning to a proposed contract said hierarchy of users assigned to said contract initiator;

distributing via said contract negotiation system said proposed contract to members of said first and second classes of users of said hierarchy;

submitting said proposed contract to said second class of users with at least one approval from said first class of users;

receiving at least one approval from said second class of users, responsive to the step of submitting said proposed contract to said second class of users; and

generating a contract-based document, responsive to said receiving step.

41. A process for managing user access to a sharable contract database, said method comprising the steps of:

providing said sharable contract database of editable data defining a contract as a plurality of discrete contract components;

assigning a class level to each user in a hierarchy of users having access to said sharable contract database;

assigning to said contract a contract status indicator that is stored in said sharable contract database and indicates a negotiation status of said contract that is capable of changing during said process;

generating a dynamic user access mode based on said class level and said contract status indicator; and

preventing a user in said hierarchy of users from changing said contract status indicator, based on said dynamic user access mode.

45. An automated contract negotiation system, having a plurality of users coupled to a communication network, for managing user access to a contract, said system comprising:

a sharable contract database of editable data defining said contract as a plurality of discrete contract components that has a class level assigned to each user in a hierarchy of user having access to said sharable contract database;

a contract status indicator field in said sharable contract database that indicates a negotiation status of said contract and is capable of changing during an automated contract negotiation process;

a client applet for providing access to said sharable contract database to said plurality of users;

a first server coupled to said client applet;

a second server coupled to said sharable contract database and said first server that updates said sharable contract database; and

at least one database field in said sharable contract database that indicates a dynamic user access mode based on said class level and said contract status indicator field, said dynamic user access mode being capable of preventing a user in said hierarchy of users from changing said editable data in said sharable contract database.

46. A program storage medium, readable by a computer, tangibly embodying a program of instructions executable by said computer for generating a contract having terms that conform to a set of predetermined contract parameters, the program comprising instructions for:

assigning a number of contract points to define said set of predetermined contract parameters;

assigning said number of contract points to a total available points value;

assigning a predetermined option point value to a contract option;

receiving a selection of said contract option for inclusion in said contract;

deducting said predetermined option point value from said total available points value; and

displaying said total available points value, responsive to said deducting step to generate a contract among multiple users coupled to a network from said selection of contract option.

47. A computer program for executing a computer process, said computer program being readable from a storage medium by a computing system and encoding a program of instructions for negotiating an contract, said computer process comprising the steps of:

providing a user-operable contract negotiator applet on a client computer;

providing access to a contract database by a first user via said contract negotiator applet, said database storing a plurality of contract component tables;

displaying information relating to a selected one of said plurality of contract components

storing data received from said contract negotiator to said contract database;

submitting said contract components to a second user in said contract database; and

providing access to a contract database by said second user via said contract negotiator applet, responsive to said submitting step.

48. A method of creating a contract type within a contract negotiator system comprising multiple users coupled to a network, the method comprising the steps of:

providing a first generalized template and a second generalized template that define database storage in a contract database;

defining at least one contract component of said new contract including said first generalized template;

defining a contract tree including said at least one contract component;

storing display data in said first generalized template;

displaying said displaying data in an applet;

receiving response data in said applet; and

storing said response data in said second generalized template to create said contract within said contract negotiator system.